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Leon Sloss, 80; Expert on U.S. Nuclear Policy

By Joe Holley
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Leon Sloss, 80, a national security expert whose specialty was nuclear strategy, died Nov. 1 of throat cancer at Sibley Memorial Hospital. He was a Chevy Chase resident.

During the Carter administration, Mr. Sloss led a study of U.S. nuclear policy that culminated in Presidential Directive 59, which inaugurated a major shift in U.S. targeting policy for nuclear weapons. Key elements of the study, conducted from 1978 to 1979, included expanding the number of cities, military bases and other places in the Soviet Union to be targeted and developing a secure reserve force.

"Given the fact that both the United States and the Soviet Union had many thousands of nuclear weapons at the time, we believed that it was only prudent to plan for the possibility that not all of these weapons would be used in a single strike, and thus a war might go on for some time under the threat of additional nuclear strikes," Mr. Sloss wrote in a 1997 letter to The Washington Post. "While it was difficult to foresee anyone winning such a conflict, it seemed far preferable to set a national goal of 'prevailing' rather than, say, 'losing.' "

Fred Ikl?, a former director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and now a scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, worked closely with Mr. Sloss. "He always analyzed things thoughtfully and carefully," Ikl? recalled. "He often came up with a different spin on things."

Mr. Sloss was born in San Francisco and served in the Philippines and Japan during World War II. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

He received a bachelor's degree from Stanford University in 1949 and a master's degree in public affairs from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs in 1951.

He joined the Bureau of the Budget shortly after receiving his degree at Princeton and moved to the State Department in 1966. From 1973 to 1975, he was deputy director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs in the State Department.

In 1975, as a fellow of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington and the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, he published papers on NATO mobilization

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strategy and led an international study group on theater nuclear forces. He was assistant director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency from 1976 to 1978 and U.S. ambassador to the Seabed Treaty Negotiations in 1977 and 1978.

Mr. Sloss retired from the federal government in 1979 to manage the Washington office of SRI International, a consulting and research firm. In 1981, he founded and became president of Leon Sloss Associates, a consulting firm specializing in national security affairs. He led the firm until his death.

He remained engaged with the national security issues that had been the focus of his attention for more than half a century. Responding to a 2005 Council on Foreign Relations article on the United States' nuclear posture, he wrote: "In today's world, the U.S. nuclear posture is essentially a hedge against an uncertain future. In evaluating the overall posture, it is important that the right balance be struck between readiness and restraint, so that the hedging does not unduly stimulate the emergence of the circumstances hedged against."

Mr. Sloss was a board member of Arena Stage, a volunteer at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History and a supporter of Stanford University.

Survivors include his wife of 52 years, Virginia Green Sloss of Chevy Chase; four children, Deborah Sloss of Los Altos, Calif., David Sloss of St. Louis, Michael Sloss of Washington and Laura Sloss of Bethesda; a sister, Nancy Sloss of Washington; a brother, Peter Sloss of San Francisco; and 11 grandchildren.

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